DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 947 PS 029 899

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TITLE	"Good Guys Don't Wear Hats": Children's Talk about the Media.
ISBN	ISBN-0-8077-3886-7
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	176p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Teachers College Press, P.O. Box 20, Williston, VT 05495-0020 (paperback: ISBN-0-8077-3886-7, $21.95; hardcover: ISBN-0-8077-3887-5, $46). Tel: 800-575-6566 (Toll Free); Fax: 802-864-7626; e-mail: tcpress@tc.columbia.edu; Web site: http://www.tcpress.com.
PUB TYPE	Books (010) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	Document Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Aggression; *Childhood Attitudes; *Children; Colonialism; Elementary School Students; *Ethnic Groups; Ethnography; Family (Sociological Unit); Focus Groups; Gender Issues; *Imitation; Literary Criticism; Mass Media; *Mass Media Effects; Middle Class Culture; Sex Differences; Stereotypes; Theories; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS	Bakhtin (Mikhail); Deconstruction; Media Literacy

ABSTRACT

This book details an ethnographic study focused on how children think and talk about media representations of violence, gender, race, colonialism, and social class. Participating in the study were 162 elementary school students in Hawaii. Groups of 6- to 12-year-olds viewed clips from 2 television commercials and 2 movies and were later interviewed in groups of 4 to 6 with varying gender composition. Children were videotaped while they watched the clips and during discussions. Literary and critical analysis techniques within a Bakhtinian approach were used to examine children's conversations about clips from the film "Swiss Family Robinson." The book describes the methodological difficulties of demonstrating that watching media violence makes children violent and the concept of imitative violence, dismissing the concept as something that distracts scholars from developing more nuanced understandings of the ways in which media content disturbs, confuses and traumatizes viewers. It is asserted that the focus should be on how film violence is located within a larger moral and ideological argument about justifiable uses of force against certain categories of people. The findings provide evidence that the meanings children make out of the movies they watch arise out of their experiences in living in a specific local context. Children evidenced a clear understanding of middle-class families and used their understanding to distinguish between good guys and bad guys. Attributes evident in children's comments about the "good guys" included niceness, industriousness, and ingenuity. The book also discusses the dilemma of middle-class masculinity, and concludes with a discussion of media effects, children's talk, and interpretive methods. (Contains 98 references.) (KB)

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